

## Honoring Our Nation's Veterans

*Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin*  
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As we observe Veterans Day this year, I would like to recognize all of those who have bravely served our country in uniform and offer my gratitude on behalf of a grateful nation. South Dakotans have bravely answered the call to serve for generations. Men and women from our state have served in every conflict this nation has seen in the 20th century -- including our current missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. I salute their memory and honor their bravery.

This patriotic sense of duty to country is one of the many reasons why I am proud to represent South Dakota in Congress and serve on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and chair its Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. As a member of this committee, I have been committed to ensuring our veterans receive the benefits they deserve such as properly funded health care, flexible education benefits for active duty and reserve soldiers, and employment assistance for veterans who are joining the civilian workforce.

As Chair of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, providing our veterans with access to resources and support to ensure a successful transition to the civilian workforce is one of my top priorities. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is a critical part of this effort. Since this program was enacted in June of 2008, the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity has held six oversight hearings on the implementation of the Post-9/11 program. I remain committed to working with the Department of Veterans Affairs to implement the short and long-term strategies for the

Post-9/11 G.I. Bill program, and to improve, streamline and expand educational entitlements for our nation's service members, veterans and dependents.

Along with my work on the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, I have worked with my colleagues on the committee to expand and improve VA health care services for women veterans. I'm pleased the House of Representatives passed legislation I introduced entitled the Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act in June. This bill will help the VA better meet these specialized needs and develop new systems to provide for the health care of women veterans – especially those who were sexually assaulted, suffer from PTSD, or who need child care services. The VA must meet the needs of our growing and diverse veteran population, and I'm hopeful that the Senate will soon take up similar legislation introduced by Senator Patty Murray.

Since he took office in January, the President and his administration have demonstrated a commitment to keep our promise to our men and women who have served in uniform. I was proud to join the President recently in the signing of legislation that would provide funding for VA health care accounts one year in advance. By providing this funding in advance, we ensure that critical resources necessary to meet veterans' needs aren't beholden to politically-motivated legislative delays and, ultimately, veterans will receive the care they need and deserve in a timely manner.

In addition, I was honored to host Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Erik K. Shinseki at the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center for a town hall meeting this summer with South Dakota veterans. This forum provided a diverse cross-section of veterans an opportunity to raise issues they have experienced in seeking benefits and, specifically, the challenges of securing those benefits in rural areas. I look forward to continuing my work with my colleagues in the House along with Secretary Shinseki and other Administration officials to ensure the VA has the resources and support necessary to meet the needs of South Dakota's veterans.

Those who have bravely served our country in uniform deserve to be protected as best we know how – not just with armaments, equipment, training and support while in service – but also with essential services when they become veterans. I'm proud to advocate on behalf of our veterans in Congress and will continue my work to ensure we keep our nation's promise to those who have served and sacrificed.